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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR DISCUSSES PARAMILITARY ISSUES WITH
SENATOR PARDO

REF: BOGOTA 5619

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood, Reasons: 1.4 B & D.

11. (C) Summary: On December 15, Ambassador hosted a breakfast for Senator Rafael Pardo, Liberal Party presidential nomination candidate, and prominent critic of the GOC on paramilitary (AUC) demobilization and the Justice and Peace Law. Pardo criticized the law as weak on justice, reparations, and dismantling AUC criminal structures. Ambassador stressed our consistent public call for the GOC to effectively implement the law. Ambassador and Pardo agreed on the importance of USG continuing to state our desire that AUC narcotraffickers spend time in prison and be extradited to the U.S. Pardo conceded that the paramilitary peace process is irreversible and doubted the AUC would consider going back to fight the Colombian state. He expressed strong concern about the degree of AUC meddling in Congressional elections slated for March 12. End Summary.

12. (C) Ambassador met for over two hours on December 15 with Senator Rafael Pardo Rueda, minister of Defense under President Gaviria, and current candidate for the Liberal Party's presidential nomination. The majority of the discussion centered on paramilitary (AUC) demobilization and implementation of the Justice and Peace Law. (Comment: Pardo was a vocal, leading critic on several important elements of the law during its debate in the Congress. End Comment.) Pardo reiterated his criticism of the law, stating it was weak on justice, reparations, and dismantling AUC criminal structures. Ambassador replied that the law had passed with ample majorities in Congress and that the GOC was genuinely committed to implementing it effectively and as quickly as possible. Ambassador reviewed for Pardo USG resources committed to the process to date and said the U.S. was looking for ways to do more. Ambassador stressed the need for the Colombian private sector to greatly improve its efforts to offer gainful employment for reinserted AUC members.

13. (C) Pardo claimed that the GOC had no interest in seeing leading AUC drug traffickers in prison. He stated that recent case of alias Don Berna, who was moved from a maximum to medium security prison, was a bad sign for the Colombian public, showing that Don Berna was effectively calling the shots. Ambassador stressed that the USG has been very insistent, both publicly and privately, that we wanted to see Don Berna and other leading AUC criminals in jail, and eventually extradited to the U.S. Pardo recognized that the USG had played a key role in keeping pressure on the AUC leadership. Ambassador reminded Pardo that the GOC's

decision to suspend the extradition of Don Berna was conditioned on his continued cooperation on demobilization and that the suspension would be reviewed after he is processed formally under the Justice and Peace Law.

¶4. (C) Pardo expressed strong concern over the level of AUC influence/intimidation in the current Congressional campaign season, which ends with elections on March 12. He stated that the most important short term goal of the AUC is to elect enough members of Congress sympathetic to its cause to reform the Constitution to block extradition. (Comment: Any legislation to modify extradition, in general terms, would require modifying the Constitution. Constitutional reform is a lengthy process that requires approval by the majority of members of both houses. See Reftel for observations on the level of AUC influence in the current Congress. End Comment.) Ambassador recognized Pardo's concern as legitimate and said he would look for opportunities to express publicly that AUC members who meddle in the electoral process be stripped of any and all Justice and Peace Law benefits.

¶5. (C) Despite his misgivings about the strength of the law and the pace of its implementation, Pardo acknowledged that the paramilitary peace process is irreversible and doubted that the AUC would consider going back to fighting the Colombian state. He said that the AUC's game plan is to manipulate the political process, primarily through the March Congressional elections, and not to challenge the GOC militarily.

WOOD